

Column

“If Christianity was morality, then Socrates would be the Saviour,” once observed the English poet William Blake.

Blake was right. The Christian faith is more than a list of do's and don'ts. Jesus Himself, speaking of the law of Moses, said, “The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life (2 Corinthians 3:6). In view of His words, no Christian would want to be accused of being a legalist.

With that said, however, many Christians over the years have found adopting what is called a "rule of life" helpful. Indeed, when I give Confirmation classes for young people, I urge them to draw up a list of practices which will keep them on track.

But, rules of life are not just for young people. Older folk can profit from such a checklist as well. Every Christian should aim for maturity, thus to be a productive member of the Lord's family. “Let us go on unto perfection,” admonishes the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (6:1).

Having a ‘card you can carry in your pocket’ with some basic rules is often helpful, in particular for those just starting out. There may well come a time, though, when this card will no longer be needed and can be put aside.

How might this work? Well, in the same way that engaging a GPS device is a good idea when going to a place you have never been before. Once you have been there a time or two, you may well find that you no longer need this ‘bossy lady’ telling you to turn here and go there. You can then turn her off and make the journey on your own. By this time, you have the route ‘written in your heart’, making external devices no longer needed. So, it is with rules of life.

A commendable rule of life for adults was drawn up some years ago by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. It is entitled ‘A Guide to Church Membership’ and calls upon all church members:

-- To follow the example of Christ in home and daily life and to bear witness to Him;

-- To be regular in private prayer day by day:

- To read the Bible carefully;
- To come to Church every Sunday (unless providentially hindered);
- To receive the Holy Communion faithfully and regularly;
- To give personal service to Church, neighbours and community;
- To uphold the standard of marriage entrusted by Christ to His Church;
- To care that children are brought up to love and serve the Lord; and
- To give money for the work of the Church at home and overseas.

None of these are terribly profound, but what would happen if they were adopted and followed? I am convinced everything would change. Those who took them on would grow in their faith; their witness to those outside the church would increase; their homes would be happier places, and their local churches would take on new life.

Why not put a rule of life card in your pocket today?

O ALMIGHTY Lord, and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern, both our hearts and bodies, in the ways of thy laws, and in the works of thy commandments; that, through thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer).

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.